

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 8170

EXDIS

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EAID, IS,JO,SY

SUBJECT: MAQARIN DAM PROJECT

REFS:AMMAN 7183; TEL AVIV 7991

1. WE QUESTION WHETHER IT WOULD BE WISE FOR USG TO PLAY AN INTERMEDIARY ROLE ON THIS SUBJECT AT THIS TIME. FINDING AGREEMENT ON SUCH A SENSITIVE AND COMPLEX MATTER -- INVOLVING AS IT DOES THE BROADER QUESTION OF RIPARIAN RIGHTS IN THE JORDAN BASIN -- WILL BE DIFFICULT AND TIME CONSUMING. IT COULD THUS INTERFERE WITH WHAT WE ASSUME WILL BE OUR MAIN INTEREST NEXT YEAR -- NEGOTIATIONS AIMED AT ENDING THE ARAB/ISRAELI CONFLICT. MOREOVER, IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT AGREEMENT ON THE SHARING OF JORDAN WATERS MAY NOT BE POSSIBLE UNTIL FURTHER PROGRESS IS MADE IN THE BROADER POLITICAL CONTEXT.

2. WE ARE THEREFORE INCLINED TO THE VIEW THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR US NOT TO BE IN THE MIDDLE ON THIS QUESTION. PERHAPS THE WORLD BANK OR A UN AGENCY COULD SERVE AS INTERMEDIARY. WE SHOULD OF COURSE ASSIST IN EVERY WAY POSSIBLE -- SHORT OF TAKING THE LEAD.

3. FOR THE NEAR FUTURE, WE BELIEVE THAT WE MUST HAVE A FULL AND OPEN EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION ON DEVELOPMENTS

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UP TO THIS POINT. UNLESS WE BEING THE ISRAELIS FULLY

INTO THE PICTURE THERE WILL BE HEIGHTENED SUSPICION AND SPECULATION ABOUT JORDANIAN, AND PROBABLY OUR, INTENTIONS. ILLUSTRATIVE OF THIS IS THE REPORT IN THE JERUSALEM POST OF DECEMBER 3 STATING THAT THE JORDANIANS ARE "HARD AT WORK THROWING A DAM ACROSS THE YARMUK EAST OF THE BORDER. THEY ARE ALSO CHANNELING THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS TO KEEP THE YARMUK WATER OUT OF SIGHT AND, PRESUMABLY, ALSO OUT OF REACH OF ISRAELI ARTILLERY." ARTICLE GOES ON TO QUOTE ISRAELI WATER AUTHORITY ENGINEERS AS SAYING THAT THEY HAVE COMPLETED PLANS TO "REVIVE" THE JODAN RIVER BY REDUCING THE SALINITY TO AN ACCEPTABLE LEVEL. IT ADDS THAT "POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS PERMITTING, THE WATER AUTHORITY HOPES TO BE ABLE TO IMPLEMENT ITS PLANS WITHIN A DECADE AND THEN UTILIZE THE RIVER ALONG ITS ENTIRE LENGTH TO IRRIGATE THE FLOOR OF THE WEST SIDE OF THE JORDAN RIFT." WATER AUTHORITY SPOKESMAN, YACOBVITZ, IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT THE "GILGAD PUMPING STATION ON THE JORDAN HAS BEEN CONSTRUCTED AS A PILOT PROJECT TO PROVIDE IRRIGATION FOR THREE PIONEERING SETTLEMENTS LOCATED BETWEEN JERICHO AND THE BEIT SHEAN VALLEY."

4. SINCE THE ISRAELIS ARE PROCEEDING WITH THEIR OWN PLANS FOR UTILIZATION OF WATER IN THE ORDAN BASIN, ON BOTH SIDES OF THE "GREEN LINE", THERE IS AN OBVIOUS NEED FOR EARLY COORDINATION WITH THE JORDANIANS. THIS PRESUMABLY IS ALSO EVIDENT TO THE GOVERNMENT OF JORDAN. WE UNDERSTAND THAT UNTIL THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS THE ISRAELIS ADHERED APPROXIMATELY TO THEIR ALLOCATION OF WATER UNDER THE JOHNSTON PLAN. HOWEVER, THEY ARE NOW ALMOST CERTAINLY DRAWING OFF MORE THAN THEIR ALLOCATION OF FORTY PER CENT OF AVAILABLE WATER IN THE JORDAN SYSTEM. THIS UNDERLINES THE NEED FOR A REGIONAL EFFORT, IDEALLY INCLUDING THE LITANI RIVER WHICH NOW FLOWS FOR MOST PART UNUSED INTO THE MEDITERRANEAN.

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